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Which content is appropriate for instructional based social network? Opinions of K12 teachers in Turkey

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Abstract

The widespread use of social technologies, in particular Web 2.0 tools, is a relatively new phenomenon. Critics have voiced their concerns about the possible negative effects of social network use, such as inappropriate pictures and fake users. Developing an instruction-based social network can be considered a solution to the potential risks of these networks for instructional uses. In that case, there some other questions rise, such as, “What kind of applications / activities can be shared?”, “Are the activities limited to instructional content only?”, “What is the scope of instruction-based social networks?”. This study aims to explore teacher’s opinions on instruction-based social networks.

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1. Introduction

Social network services can be defined as an individual web page that enables online, human relationship building by collecting useful information and sharing it with specific or non-specific people (Kwon & Yixing, 2010). Some social networking websites are used by millions of people every day on a regular basis, and it seems that social networking is a part of everyday life (Murray, 2008). Since their introduction, social network sites (SNSs) such as MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld, and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

As an example of a well-known social network application, Facebook.com, which is the most popular SNS in Turkey, has a 26 million users from Turkey, 51% whom are under the age of 24 (Google, 2012; Social Bakers, 2012). Considering that half of the Facebook users are under the age of 24 demonstrates that most of the teenagers use this kind of SNS. While SNSs are not allowed for use by children under the age of 13, there are certain content restrictions in the 13-18 age group. Users under the age of 18 can easily provide misleading information about their age in order to bypass these restrictions in the subscription process. Thus, one can infer that here are far more students of a secondary education level that are actively using SNSs than statistical findings report.

Hew (2011) mentioned nine different motives for Facebook use. These motives include: “to maintain existing relationships”, “to meet new people”, “using Facebook is cool, fun”, “to make oneself more popular”, “to pass

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time”, “to express or present oneself”, “for learning purposes”, “as a task management tool”, and “for student activism” (Hew, 2011). In the educational realm, network goals as they currently exist can be broadly defined as regarding school improvement, broadening opportunities (including networking with non-school agencies, such as social services or businesses), and resource sharing (Muijs, West, & Mel, 2010).

Facebook has become a huge market for different sectors as the result of its use in various fields. Therefore, Facebook can be used for the purpose of advertisement, bypassing profile secrecy, obtaining users, accounts, and sharing advertisement in the profiles of users. Users who are introduced to Facebook face the risks of salacity, drug use, content sharing as advertising on one’s profile, or bypassing profile secrecy as a result of the large market environment of Facebook. Considering that Facebook poses certain risks to use by teenagers, social networks for educational purposes (SNSfEP) can be developed as a solution to potential threats. Some examples that have been developed for this purpose are Classroom 2.0 (www.classroom20.com) and EdWeb (www.edweb.com). However, there is not a widespread prevalence of their usage in Turkey (Alexa, 2012).

Hew (2011) mentioned that research about Facebook trends include: “Motives for Facebook use”, “Time spent on Facebook”, “Number of friends on Facebook”, “Information disclosed on Facebook”, “Privacy settings on Facebook”, “Effects of Facebook use on students’ number of discussion posts and social presence”, “Effects of Facebook self-disclosure on teacher credibility”, and “Effects of Facebook on students’ academic performance”. Studies in which SNSs are used for the purpose of instruction or supporting instruction is a common and beneficial application of Facebook groups. Another channel that can be given example except Facebook is Elgg an open-source social network engine (SNE). Thirty-five institutions/agencies/universities benefit from Elgg. There is also research that has been conducted about its instructional use in literature (Elgg, 2012).

Certain questions come to mind regarding whether using SNSs and SNE is suitable for instruction and whether it is necessary to develop SNSfEPs. Additional questions that require answers concerning the kind of applications and activities that should be shared, the scope of SNSfEPs, and whether activities should be restricted to educational purposes only. The responses of teachers, who will become SNS managers or will use this kind of platform in their classroom, are important. In the scope of this study, teachers’ perspectives are provided to answer the questions that arise in the development process of SNSfEP applications, as well as answers to the following questions:

- What are the opinions of K-12 teachers regarding SNS use in their lessons?
- What are the opinions of K-12 teachers for the appropriate applications/activities can be shared on a SNSfEP?
- What are the opinions of K-12 teachers regarding a limit on the applications/activities of a SNSfEP for instructional content only?
- What are the opinions of K-12 teachers for the scope of a SNSfEP?

2. Method

2.1. Study group

A study group was recruited, consisting of 170 teachers employed at public schools located in a certain district of Istanbul, who were a member of any SNS and willing to provide responses to the survey. Of the teachers in the study group, 6.5% were under the age 25, 27.1% were between 26-30 years of age, 28.2% were between 31-35 years of age, 14.7% were between 36-40 years of age, and 23.5% were over the age of 41. According to the number of years of service of the teachers, 18.2% had 0-4 years, 28.3% had 5-9 years, 27.7% had 10-14 years, 14.7% had 15-19 years, and 14.1% had 25 years or more.

2.2. Instrument

A survey, based on 3-point and 5-point Likert scales, consisting of 18 multiple-choice questions, was used in the study. After developing the survey, expert opinions were consulted, followed by improvements and adjustments to finalize the survey. The results were evaluated by using descriptive statistical methods. The confidence interval was determined as %95 for statistical analysis of the research.

3. Findings and comments

What are the opinions of K-12 teachers regarding the use of SNSs in their lessons?

Teachers were questioned about their willingness to use SNSs in their lessons and the results are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The opinions of teachers regarding SNS use in their lessons

	f	%
I use it	29	17.1
I want to use it	43	25.3
I have never thought use it	45	26.5
I do not need to use it	25	14.7
I do not think it is appropriate to use it	28	16.5

When the table is studied, it is understood that 42.4% of the teachers in the working group use or want to use SNSs in their classes. It is a pleasing result to find out that nearly half of teachers are ready to integrate SNSs into their instruction. 26.5% of the teachers in the study group do not want to use this type of application, and 14.7% of them do not need to use it. These teachers can be considered as potential users of SNSs for instructional aims if they could be convinced. On the other hand, 16.5% of the teachers in the study group do not think it is appropriate to use SNSs. From this result, one can deduce that there is a group of some teacher who are resistant to integration of SNSs in an instructional environment.

What are the opinions of K-12 teachers for the appropriate applications/activities that can be shared on a SNSfEP?

The teachers' responses to what applications and activities can be used and the results are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. K-12 teachers' opinions regarding the appropriate applications/activities on a SNSfEP

Statements	Should be allowed (3)		Undecided (2)		Should not be allowed (1)		m
	%	f	%	f	%	f	
Picture sharing	71.2	121	18.2	31	10.6	18	2.60
Video sharing	74.7	127	18.2	31	7.1	12	2.67
Developing surveys	85.3	145	9.4	16	5.3	9	2.80
Status updates	64.1	109	22.4	38	13.5	23	2.50
Chat	63.5	108	19.4	33	17.1	29	2.46
File sharing	84.1	143	11.2	19	4.7	8	2.79
Establishing groups for educational purposes	81.2	138	14.1	24	4.7	8	2.76
Establishing student groups(for social activities)	67.6	115	24.1	41	8.2	14	2.59
Areaof interest groups (not for educational purposes)	70.6	120	17.6	30	11.8	20	2.58
Establishing professional organizations for teachers	88.2	150	7.6	13	4.1	7	2.84
Establishing entertaining and interesting sharing groups	62.4	106	24.7	42	12.9	22	2.49
Organizing collaborative documents	84.7	144	8.8	15	6.5	11	2.78
Playing games and sharing for educational purposes	79.4	135	12.4	21	8.2	14	2.71
Playing games and sharing for pleasure	45.9	78	26.5	45	27.6	47	2.18
Applications for educational purposes(except games, other educational applications of SNSs)	81.8	139	12.4	21	5.9	10	2.75
Applications outside the purpose of education(except games, other applications of SNSs that cannot be used for educational purposes)	43.5	74	36.5	62	20.0	34	2.23

Due to the use of the 3-point Likert scale, the mean values of opinions should be considered as “should not be allowed”, “undecided”, and “should be allowed” for the ranges between 1-1.66, 1.67-2.32, and 2.33-3.00 respectively. Thus, according to data in Table 2, teachers have generally a positive opinion of applications and

activities could be shared on SNSs as follows: “developing surveys (m=2.8)”, “file sharing (m=2.79)”, “organizing collaborative documents (m=2.78)”, “educational groups (m=2.76)”, “applications for educational purposes (m=2.75)”, “playing/sharing games for educational purposes (m=2.71)”, “video sharing (m=2.67)”, “picture sharing (m=2.6)”, “student groups (for social activities) (m=2.59)”, “area of interest groups (outside of educational purposes) (m=2.58)”, “status updates (m=2.5)”, “establishing entertaining and interesting sharing groups” (m=2.49)”, and “chat (m=2.46)”. However, it is observed that there is an uncertainty about the SNSfEP applications that are about “playing games and sharing for pleasure (m=2.18)” and “applications outside of educational purposes (m=2.23)”.

These results can be evaluated in such a way that implies that teachers are concerned about students, most of whom can become distracted by the “fun” SNSfEP applications, drawing them away from the potential benefits. On the other hand, when it is considered that teachers have a positive perception about the establishment of entertaining and interesting groups, one can conclude that teachers are convinced that sharing within entertaining and interesting groups can occur in the field of education.

What are the opinions of K-12 teachers regarding a limit on the applications/activities of a SNSfEP for instructional content only?

The teachers’ opinions regarding the SNSfEP groups/pages that may be established without an educational purpose are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. K-12 teachers’ opinions on limiting applications/activities on a SNSfEP

Statements	Should be allowed (3)		Undecided (2)		Should not be allowed (1)		m
	%	f	%	f	%	f	
Sports pages/groups	47.6	81	25.3	43	27.1	46	2.20
General culture pages/groups	88.2	150	8.2	14	3.5	6	2.84
Politics pages/groups	25.9	44	21.2	36	52.9	90	1.72
Religious pages/groups	25.9	44	31.8	54	42.4	72	1.83
News pages/groups	76.5	130	17.1	29	6.5	11	2.70
Education pages/groups	91.2	155	5.9	10	2.9	5	2.88
Pages/groups of actors/writers/directors/singers, etc...	58.2	99	24.7	42	17.1	29	2.41
Entertainment pages/groups	44.7	76	37.6	64	17.6	30	2.27
Cultural activities pages/groups	86.5	147	8.2	14	5.3	9	2.81
Professional collaboration pages/groups	85.9	146	8.8	15	5.3	9	2.80
Social club pages/groups	84.7	144	8.8	15	6.5	11	2.78

According to the data in Table 3, education (m=2.88), general culture (m=2.84), cultural activities (m=2.81), professional collaboration (m=2.8), cultural clubs (m=2.81), news (m=2.7), actors/writers/directors/singers, etc... (m=2.41), are groups/pages that teachers in the study found acceptable for use in SNSfEPs. On the other hand, teachers were undecided on the issue of the SNSfEP groups whose subjects regarding entertainment (m=2.27), sports(m=2.20), religion (m=1.83), and politics (m=1.72). When Table 2 and Table 3 are evaluated together, teachers’ opinions are similar regarding the intended features of SNSfEPs. Results show that teachers have some reservations about sharing “fun” applications, even though they do not strictly reject the idea.

What are opinions of K-12 teachers for the scope of SNSfEP?

The opinions of teachers for the scope of SNSfEP and the percent of frequency distribution are provided in Table 4.

Table4. K-12 teachers’ opinion regarding the scope of instruction-based social networks

Statements	Class-based		School-wide		District-wide		Province-wide		Country-wide		International	
	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
What is the intended scope of instruction-based social networks?	10	17	21,8	37	3,5	6	5,3	9	33,5	57	25,9	44

The category that had the highest frequency regarding the scope of SNSfEP is country-wide (33.5%). Support for an international scope was given by 25.9% of teachers, 21.8% for a school-wide scope, 10% for a class-based scope, 5.3% for a province-based scope, and 3.5% for a district-wide scope. The most notable result from these finding is the high rate of the preference for an international scope (25.9%). Considering the linguistic obstacles related to international SNSfEPs (such as Classroom2.0 and EdWeb), and low usage of these sites throughout Turkey, one can infer that the teachers considered the use of international SNSfEPs most ideal. It should be remembered that international SNSfEPs can be implemented only if domestic support could be provided.

When questioned about the scope of SNSfEP, teachers were also asked about whether it is appropriate for age groups to be combined. The opinions of teachers about the separation of different age groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The opinions of teachers about the separation of different age groups

Statements	%	f
No need for separation	18.2	31
Grade-based separation	24.7	42
School type-based separation	57.1	97

According to data in Table 5, 18.2% of teachers believe there is no need for separation, 24.7% of teachers believe separation is necessary according to grade, and 57.1% of teachers believe separation is necessary according to the type of school. These results show that more than half of the teachers think positively about isolating students on SNSfEPs on the basis of school type. It is possible that teachers see some benefits from combining the groups at the same developmental period and not dividing them based on age.

Result

This study researched teachers' opinions regarding the features of SNSfEPs, as well as what the types of groups/pages should be included, and the scope within which these systems should be established.

It can be concluded that half of the teachers from the study group believe that these types of applications can be used positively in education, or have already used them in their lessons, which can facilitate SNSfEP integration. When reviewing the teachers' opinions regarding the applications that should be included in a SNSfEP, they strongly support its use for developing surveys, document sharing and collaborative documents. Currently, there is not application that supports collaborative documents in SNSs or SNS engines.

From the data collected, it can be inferred that teachers are undecided about sharing applications / activities with no educational purposes, as they are concerned about the potential negative impact on students' motivation. However, they do not have such strict opinions about sharing. When the results are considered, it is possible that teachers, who also use SNSs, are aware of the bonding effect of these kinds of extra-curricular, entertaining activities, and want to give some credit to them.

The results demonstrated that the teachers had positive opinions about groups/pages that have no educational purpose, but had negative opinions regarding groups/pages that had political content. Although groups that are religious in nature can play a role in terms of "Religion and Ethics" courses, political and religious groups that have the potential to promote an agenda may have negatively affected teachers' responses to our survey.

Regarding the scope of SNSfEP, one in three teachers believes that such systems should have a national scope. From these responses, one can conclude that the teachers anticipate the students' and teachers' ability to communicate throughout the country. There is potential for greater collaboration for teachers and students among schools throughout society from different regions on one platform. International scope is also highly preferred by

teachers. Thus, each country's right to sufficient domestic support for international SNSfEPs should be brought to the forefront of the agenda. Without such support, countries that do not have systems that operate in their language are significantly restricted by a lack of access to such systems.

The virtual community created by SNSs creates an environment in which different age groups are combined. In that case, the potential problems of gathering kids and teens that are at different developmental stages in the same platform should be considered. Teachers' responses show that several separate platforms may be established for different types of schools in order to isolate different developmental stage groups.

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